

# WRITE FREE OR DIE

The Newsletter of the UNH Writing Programs

Volume 3, Issue 2

Spring 2017

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## Reading, Writing; Writing, Reading

Ed Mueller

Director, University Writing Programs

The connection between reading and writing is a commonplace. Often, this relationship is framed in terms of the influence of reading on writing, that practice in reading improves writing. There is a Carnegie study, however, that examines the obverse: how writing improves reading. While not suggesting that discussing reading in class has no value, it adds, "The evidence is clear: writing can be a vehicle for improving reading. In particular, having students write about a text they are reading enhances how well they comprehend it" (Graham and Hebert 6). Although focused on K-12, the report, *Writing to Read*:

*Evidence for How Writing Can Improve*

*Reading*, contains useful general insights. For instance, the study indicates there is value in low-stakes and informal writing as vehicles to engage reading (summaries, journals, reaction papers, guided note taking).

Looking more broadly, there are interesting concordances between this report and what the literature on citation practice has to say about reading. In his study of college students' citation practice in upper-level biology, John Swales notes that "high-performing writers had a greater tendency to use 'concept-focused' rather than 'person-focused' citations" (133). This

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## Future Tense: Upcoming Writing Across the Curriculum Events, Spring 2017

- "Grammar for Grown-Ups: Dealing With Error in Student Writing," Guest Speaker, Dr. Tom Carnicelli. March 29, 2:30-4:00 (Memorial Union Building, Room 338/340).

Non-English teachers (and even some English teachers, in private) often voice concerns about feeling ill equipped to characterize and respond to "grammar" (or error) in student writing. This presentation and workshop will help to inform faculty of the conventions of usage and equip them to better recognize and more meaningfully respond to error in student writing. Dr. Carnicelli, Professor Emeritus of English at UNH, taught the "English Grammar" course, has been Director of Composition/First-Year Writing (EN401), and authored the "Grammar and Style" chapter of the *Transitions* text that is in use in all EN401 classes at UNH. Space is limited. Please contact Ed Mueller to register: [edward.mueller@unh.edu](mailto:edward.mueller@unh.edu).

- Student Exit Interviews: April 26, 2:30-4:00 (Memorial Union Building, Room 338).

The Writing Committee will once again sponsor exit interviews with a panel of graduating seniors on their writing histories at UNH. Faculty are welcome to join. Contact Ed Mueller to attend: [edward.mueller@unh.edu](mailto:edward.mueller@unh.edu).

- Third Annual Writing Intensive Faculty Retreat: June 7-9 (Mount Washington Hotel).

The UNH Writing Program is looking forward to reprising the well-received WI Faculty Retreat at the Omni Mount Washington Hotel. Among the goals of the retreat will be to give faculty a fuller awareness of the principles underlying WI courses, equip them with practices to enhance working with student writing, and promote connections among WI faculty. Applications are being taken through March 31st. For more information, please see the flyer that accompanied this newsletter or contact Ed Mueller: [edward.mueller@unh.edu](mailto:edward.mueller@unh.edu).

## Easy reading is damned hard writing.

—Nathaniel Hawthorne

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### WAC(ky) People

#### UNH Writing Program

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finding relates to reading practice, the difference between students who engage the text conceptually and those whose reading model is limited to retrieving or reporting. Sandra Jamieson's study of the relationship between student source use and writing dovetails with Swales, suggesting that if "students tend to work from sentences rather than extended passages" they will not be grasping "the larger concepts in the texts they read or be able to assess how an argument unfolds, [or] how sources are in dialogue with each other" (15). Both of these passages touch upon the student practice of "quote mining," defined most simply as reading texts in order to find good sentences to quote (Howard, Serviss, and Rodrigue 186).

Quote mining can derive from the assignment, or the student's impression of the assignment, being focused on the end product—*write x number of pages in a certain format with x number of citations from x number of sources*. In this case, some students may economize effort by "reading" source material only to meet the citation requirement—probably not what was in mind among the goals for the assignment. This model would be a matter of habit more than ability, and could be addressed by scaffolding the process to include interim assignments that engage source material along the way or by foregrounding other goals (or both).

Quote mining could also derive from a reading challenge, however: students unfamiliar with the discourse or who lack practice writing in the discipline. These students may not be able to recognize larger units of meaning in the source—"unable to see the forest through the trees" (if you will forgive the usage). When writing, these students are also likely to "report" or "retrieve" by producing patch writing (stringing quotes or bits

of source text together) in order to reproduce or approximate the language of the discipline in the absence of their own.

In the latter case, Graham and Hebert mention using writing to guide students to see and work with larger units in source texts (18), and also to shape students' own writing practice to help understand structures in the reading (i.e., constructing their own paragraphs can lead to understanding how source paragraphs operate). Jamieson advances a similar conceptual approach: "An understanding of the parts of academic texts functions in the same way as an understanding of the parts of the sentence, empowering students to identify and focus on key aspects of what they read and learn to engage with it as a whole—in other words, to understand the goals of reading and writing about what they read" (15).

In a modest piece of 700 words or less, dear reader, we must now come to an equally modest conclusion. In summary, we can still safely say that it is worthwhile to continue to assign and discuss reading, not only for content but to positively influence student writing, and we can also say that it is worthwhile to assign writing to promote good reading.

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Jamieson, Sandra. (2013, December 11). "What Students' Use of Sources Reveals About Advanced Writing Skills." *Across the Disciplines*, 10.4. Retrieved December 8, 2016, from <http://wac.colostate.edu/atd/reading/>

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# Dangling Modifier: Writing Conferences

Corey McCullough, Associate Director, University Writing Programs

Individualized instruction offers obvious benefits—and challenges as well. One-on-one writing conferences can be particularly useful for faculty teaching writing and writing-intensive courses. While a writing conference may certainly involve discussion of course content, the controlling concern is to address writing: to give students opportunities to receive clarification and feedback on writing for the course and on their writing process in general. Faculty stand much to gain as well by seeing, in real-time, how their students, as individual learners, are progressing and experiencing course material.

## History of Writing Conferences at UNH

Writing conferences have a rich and influential history at UNH. A conference-based approach has, in one form or another, been central to UNH's writing curriculum and extra-curriculum since the 1920s (Tirabassi 114). From 1945 to 1960, English faculty were required to conduct a minimum of three writing conferences of 20-30 minutes with each student per semester—with more encouraged (1961 Freshman English Report). In 1966 Don Murray, who had been exposed to conferencing as a UNH undergrad, suggested replacing one of three class meetings per week with a "required system of conferences" (Freshman Planning Committee Memo, 15 February 1966). Murray's suggestion found favor, and from at least 1970 until 2002, First-Year Writing instructors at UNH held weekly or bi-weekly fifteen-minute conferences with students. Around 2002, English 401 conferencing frequency shifted back to three conferences per student per semester (Carnicelli 101; Newkirk personal communication).

Other members of UNH's English and Education Departments, including Don Graves (who did pioneering work with young writers), Thomas Carnicelli, and Thomas Newkirk, were committed to utilizing and researching writing conferences as well. In a study of student feedback from 92 sections of UNH First-Year Composition in AY 1978-1979, Tom Carnicelli found that "not one of the 1,800 students found classes as useful as conferences" (105).

With faculty and student support, by the 1970s the conference approach was entrenched at UNH, having evolved from what Murray called "individualized lectures" (Tirabassi 115) to working with students on all stages of the writing process. Conferencing has since become an accepted best practice in writing pedagogy nationally and persists as a cornerstone of EN401 and other writing courses at UNH.

## The Practice of Writing Conferences

The now-favored process model of conference, in which student participation, insight, and self-criticism are brought into focus, provides an ideal context for students to develop self-directed drafting and revision strategies. Writing conferences prompt students to ask questions, elucidate intentions, critique their progress, and consider aloud their next steps.

Instructors wishing to conduct writing conferences have some logistical decisions to make. One important consideration is whether to A) read a draft and produce written comments prior to the conference, B) read but not comment on the draft prior to the conference, or C) do a "cold read" during the conference. These decisions may be influenced by the length of the paper, the length of the conference, and instructor goals.

To comment on every student paper in advance of the conference is time consuming and can orient the student towards the instructor's perceived wishes rather than the student's own developing meaning. For short papers, particularly early drafts, a cold read approach in which the instructor quickly reads the draft at the outset of the conference may be the most efficient way to promote an open-ended dialogue. A quick read approach can lead to prioritization of the most important, global issues in the draft. However, in the case of longer papers or for instructors who prefer to read slowly, away from the eyes of the student, it may make sense to read the paper in advance.

In this case, I recommend that faculty either avoid commenting on the student draft or strive to limit comments to open-ended statements and questions related to the anticipated agenda of the conference. As Newkirk warns, when an instructor has thoroughly marked a draft in advance, it can send the signal that the instructor rather than the student is setting the direction, and the student can preoccupy him- or herself with trying to determine what the instructor wants instead of examining his or her own developing skill and judgment. Put another way, there is a danger of the instructor imagining an idealized text rather than the text the student is in the process of working toward (Newkirk 323). As Murray cautions, "the instructor should remember that the purpose of the conference is not to evaluate or conclude anything, it is a conference about writing in process" (161).

Because productive one-on-one writing conferences rely heavily on the student's input, it is a good idea to hold students accountable for the conference agenda. Setting this

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*Anyone who can improve a sentence of mine by the omission or the placing of a comma is looked upon as my dearest friend.* —George Moore



(continued from page 3)

precedent in the first conference is important, as it sends the signal that students have agency over their own writing process. Research with individual conference transcripts by Newkirk and others suggests that conferences that feature more student speech are more beneficial to students than conferences in which the instructor speaks disproportionately (Newkirk 327).

Instructors can facilitate student preparedness and agenda setting by asking students to re-read their drafts before the conference and jot down questions, concerns, strengths, weaknesses, research gaps, and potential revision steps. With an appropriate agenda in place, conferences are less likely to be derailed by misplaced concerns such as sentence-level issues in an early draft. Sentence-level concerns are probably best left for what Murray calls “editing conferences” on late drafts (167).

In all cases, I recommend that instructors hold conferences in advance of the submission of a final draft of an essay. While a conference on a paper in process can influence a student going forward, a conference on a paper that has already been graded is like an “autopsy” that will have limited transfer value on the next paper and also the potential to discourage students (Carnicelli 103).

While it’s important to ask students to assume responsibility for the conference agenda, it is also useful for the instructor to have some general guiding questions. Don Murray allegedly relied heavily on one very general question, offered as much for the benefit of the author as for himself as reader: “What is this about?” (Newkirk). Another basic approach to a draft in process is to simply ask what is working well and what needs more work (166).

Other questions can be general, prompting students to reflect not only on what they are learning about the subject

but also what they are learning about writing. Taken from Murray, these may include questions like: “What did you learn in writing this draft?” “What are these drafts teaching You about the subject . . . about writing?” “What would you tell someone else to do to make this piece better?” (166).

In drafting questions to draw upon in conferences, instructors might consider which disciplinary conventions students seem to be struggling with and revisit the writing assignment description to incorporate specific aspects of into their conference questions.

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*Crappy work I do twice, good work I do three times. —Paul Fussell*

## Ask Matt:

### *Your writing concerns addressed by our very own Matt Switliski*

*Whenever I ask students for analysis, I get summary in return. What can I do to help them make the switch from summarizing to analyzing?*

—Sick of Summary

It's important to recognize that asking students to transition from summary to analysis is in fact asking for a more complex order of thinking. According to Bloom's six-level hierarchy in his taxonomy of learning, summary is in a group under Comprehension (one up from the bottom), whereas Analysis is in its own category two levels higher up (the third-most complex task). That's quite a jump, especially for students new to a discipline for whom analysis can be a term without a clear referent.

One way to begin is to define analysis for students. Unfortunately, it's difficult to find a one-size-fits-all definition. After all, rhetorical analysis is not historical analysis is not scientific analysis; each discipline values certain features in a text and conducts analysis differently. It's probably necessary, then, to describe what analysis means in a given context, whether that's for an assignment or a discipline.

One colleague explains analysis in terms of the five W's: who, what, where, when, why (and how). Summary is the *what* of a text, what's present in it. By raising questions about the text—for example, Who is it meant for? Why is X included? How does the presence of X affect the argument?—you lead readers to go beyond what is present in the text to draw inferences, make interpretations, formulate further questions. (Analysis may include more than statements.)

I take a similar tack. I think of analysis as looking closely at parts that make up something and asking questions of those parts. Depending on the nature of the assignment and course goals, I craft questions that draw attention to features I've identified as key to learning.

If you pick up any disciplinary writing guide—the “Short Guide to Writing About” series from Pearson Longman, for instance—you'll often find analysis in the index. These sections are often detailed, running several pages. Thankfully, there are some widely applicable moves, as described in Rosenwasser and Stephen's *Writing Analytically*:

**#1 Suspend judgment:** While evaluating what we read or see is almost inevitable, the longer we can withhold from doing so, the more critically we can think instead of reacting instinctively. The authors recommend getting beyond responses of like/dislike or agree/disagree by identifying causes (Okay, you dislike it. Why?) and remembering that judgments say more about the judge than the object (If X is

boring, what does that say about you?). They suggest noticing what's interesting about an object as a way to begin analyzing it, leading to exploration rather than final evaluation.

**#2 Define significant parts and how they're related:** Virtually anything you can think of is made from something else. Essays are made of words and rhetorical patterns. Movies are made of scenes (and dialogue and action . . .). In analysis, you separate an object/subject into its most important parts and ask how the parts interrelate to one another and the whole. A film analysis, for instance, might look at individual scenes and their connections or at characters; it'd be nearly impossible to divide anything into *all* of its component parts, so analysis is also a matter of selection.

**#3 Look for repetition, contrast, and anomaly:** If it's repeated, it's important, whether that repetition is direct or more subtle. That holds true for oppositions as well. Noticing these enables deeper discovery, a more thorough understanding of the subject. Also, look for what stands out, what doesn't fit neatly; doing so allows you to subvert stereotypes and conventional ideas.

**#4 Make the implicit explicit:** What is suggested or assumed? Bringing these shadowy parts of a text into the light is essential to analysis. Make the unstated into statements. Consider what implications follow from what a text says and doesn't say. The authors describe this move like so:

Observation (Description) → Implications → Conclusions (So what?)

**#5 Keep reformulating questions and explanations:** Analysis is experimental and exploratory; it doesn't begin with answers and travel neatly through a predictable series of turns. Ask questions of the material, which will lead to answers, which will lead to still more questions. The authors recommend spending more time recording details and observations. Doing this presents more options to explore than blindly choosing one direction only to wind up at a dead-end.

Perhaps one of the most useful things an instructor can do to help students integrate analysis is to bring examples of analytical writing, whether from students or professionals, as models to emulate. Explanation will likely help, but if possible, give students some starting questions that the discipline usually asks and material to practice analysis with. Walk them through the process. Make your own implicit practices explicit for their benefit. Students are capable of analysis; they just need careful scaffolding and practice. Good luck!

#### Work Cited

Rosenwasser, David, and Jill Stephen. *Writing Analytically*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed., Thomson Wadsworth, 2006, pp 42-61.

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# Student Profile: Rachel Vaz

Molly Tetreault

Assistant Director, University Writing Programs

A junior Business major, Rachel Vaz moved to New Hampshire from Brazil during her first year of high school. She related her initial challenges given this history, "Starting out at UNH, I wasn't very confident as a writer. Coming from another country and being an ESL [English as a Second Language] student definitely contributed to that." When we discussed her trajectory as a writer at UNH, she offered a number of practices UNH faculty have used to help her manage and learn through writing. She saw self-reflection and informal writing as keys to her development, and also expressed appreciation for faculty who incorporated feedback and the writing process into their courses. Interestingly, these practices are consistent with trends mentioned by other UNH students in the Writing Committee's annual Student Exit Interviews.

Reflective writing during English 401 showed Rachel how central self-examination is to the writing process, even for writing that is not "personal." She came to know that "writing well takes a lot of questioning of yourself: what you believe in, what you know, and who you are. Even in an analysis or a research paper, there is so much of you that goes into that writing process and the paper." Although she felt stuck at first, she came to realize that personal engagement was part of the process, recognizing that "knowing that you're going to have to dig into yourself is a hard thing to do."

She now sees the willingness to "throw [herself] into projects and the writing process" as a major strength and the number one suggestion that she would offer to other students. Rachel is excited to be enrolled in classes where informal writing is being used to promote student learning. In OT 513: Stressed Out: The Science and Nature of Human Stress, students keep a journal about learning in the course. In ADMIN 575: Introduction to Organizational Behavior, the instructor has students take a few moments to write a "learning bit"—relating something they learned in class that day. He sometimes puts up the range of responses on the board, which Rachel says often helps to draw her attention to aspects of the course she wasn't focusing on. Students

then compile these "learning bits" into a learning log to track their thinking over the course of the semester. Although we were only three weeks into the semester when we talked, Rachel believed that she would be able to use these reflective writing activities to contribute to the formal writing assignments that would follow.

Course requirements aside, she finds these informal writing activities personally rewarding. "I've combined these into a personal project," she said while pulling a small journal out of her backpack. "I call it 'Cool Things': stuff I'm learning in all my classes and in general."

For more formal academic writing, Rachel related that

she appreciated faculty who paid explicit attention to expectations, "It helps when professors tell you what's going on in their heads when they look at writing—what they're looking for." She especially appreciates model texts that give students "direction and ideas about the writing, the style, the approach, the voice—something students have written for the assignment in the past or some other piece of writing that is similar."

She returned repeatedly throughout the conversation to how feedback and follow-up

from professors has been critical to her growth as a writer. "Incorporating the writing process in a class is really meaningful to me. Requiring drafts and then getting feedback—I like that you learn to develop your writing more." She continued, "It's a big statement for a professor to take the time to help you. If the professor says this writing is meaningful enough that I'm going to instruct you on how to do it, and then provides you feedback, then you take the writing more seriously, too."

Given her embrace of reflection, it may come as no surprise that Rachel suggests that reflective writing pieces at the end of a course, in which students describe what they've learned, help tie the course together for her and show connections between course content and assignments.

With plans to enter the field of social business, Rachel sees attention to writing as paramount: "Entering a field that is so dynamic and still emerging, I expect there will be a lot of writing." She is looking ahead to the research and writing in the field. In the meantime, Rachel is looking forward to spending her senior year honing her writing skills at UNH.



For more information, please contact Molly at [molly.tetreault@unhedu](mailto:molly.tetreault@unhedu)

# The Grammar Box: The Elliptical Ellipsis . . .

Matt Switliski, Associate Director, University Writing Programs

The period is so self-evident as a punctuation mark that popular usage guides such as *The Elements of Style* and *Eats, Shoots & Leaves* hardly explain its purpose. If, however, periods start showing up in groups of three or four, chaos ensues.

Whatever the reasons for its muddled use, the ellipsis (. . .), also known as ellipsis points or points of ellipsis, can be a valuable tool in the writer's repertoire. Note that the ellipsis is three periods, each separated by a space, and bounded on either side by spaces.

One major function of the ellipsis shows up in narrative. An ellipsis can signal a short pause, adding drama or anticipation to a moment. Though an ellipsis like this can be used in exposition, it's typically found in dialogue:

"What I want to tell you is not exactly . . . fit for other ears."

An ellipsis can convey drawing out words and/or ideas. Consider the difference between these exchanges:

"We could . . ."

"We could what?"

"We could . . . maybe . . ."

"Come on, out with it already!"

"We could —"

"We could what?"

"We could — maybe —"

"Come on, out with it already!"

The pace in the first dialogue is slower, more hesitant, whereas the second one is more abrupt, especially when the first speaker interrupts with "maybe," as if s/he had just barely finished verbalizing "could." The ellipsis can also be used to suggest trailing off.

*If the company went bankrupt, then. . . .*

*"I don't know why. . . ."*

Notice in the above examples that the ending punctuation (the period) follows the ellipses.

The other major function of the ellipsis is to signal an omission, particularly when using quoted material. The style guides for MLA, APA, and Chicago all include sections on the proper use of ellipses when incorporating sources. Let's see some examples. (For the sake of ease, the Tuchman and Rivers examples are taken from the eighth edition of the *MLA Handbook*.)

## Original

Medical thinking, trapped in the theory of astral influences, stressed air as the communicator of disease, ignoring sanitation or visible carriers.

From Barbara W. Tuchman's *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous Fourteenth Century* (Ballantine, 1979)

## Mid-Quote Ellipsis

In surveying various responses to plagues in the Middle Ages, Barbara W. Tuchman writes, "Medical thinking . . . stressed air as the communicator of disease, ignoring sanitation or visible carriers" (101-02).

## Ending Ellipsis

In surveying various responses to plagues in the Middle Ages, Barbara W. Tuchman writes, "Medical thinking, trapped in the theory of astral influences, stressed air as the communicator of disease. . . ."

The ellipsis at the end communicates that the original sentence contained more information than presented here. If the sentence were complete, it would be understood that more text followed and no ellipses would be needed. When including the parenthetical citation for a quote that ends on an ellipsis, the final punctuation mark follows the reference:

In surveying various responses to plagues in the Middle Ages, Barbara W. Tuchman writes, "Medical thinking, trapped in the theory of astral influences, stressed air as the communicator of disease. . . ." (101-02).

For quotations that omit parts of a sentence and/or multiple sentences, the appearance on the page is the same.

## Misuse and Overuse

Be careful whenever you omit information to not change the meaning of the passage.

## Original

This film is as exciting as watching grass grow.

## Inaccurate Omission

According to one review, "This film is . . . exciting. . . ."

As with the more uncommon punctuation marks, take care to not use the ellipsis too often. Too many can break up the natural flow of reading, and frequent ellipses with quoted material can raise suspicion of being unfair to the sources.

## Work Cited

Modern Language Association of America. *MLA Handbook*. 8th ed., Modern Language Association of America, 2016.

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*A great many people now reading and writing would be better employed  
keeping rabbits.*

*—Edith Sitwell*

## Past Perfect: Director's Notes

Ed Mueller Director, University Writing Programs

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[Online Writing Lab \(OWL\)](#)

The University Writing Programs (UWPs) were created to promote, support and assess writing at the University of New Hampshire. The UWPs are housed in Academic Affairs and report to the Senior Vice Provost for Academic Affairs. The UWPs are contained in a single unit that includes responsibility for the Writing Committee, Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC), the Connors Writing Center (CWC), and the Online Writing Lab (OWL). The curricular component of WAC, consisting of the writing-intensive (WI) courses, is situated within academic departments.

We work with academic units, departments, allied programs, individual faculty, and students to advance the culture of writing at UNH. This approach values and encourages writing as an "activity and subject of study,"<sup>[1]</sup> not only in writing intensive (WI) classes but wherever writing occurs. Through frequent guided practice, UNH students become accustomed to negotiating the writing process, are more self aware and able to transfer positive writing habits, and can adjust to differing genre conventions. We offer a wide array of services and resources to support students and faculty with their writing-based endeavors in the curriculum.

[1] Adler-Kassner, Linda, and Elizabeth Wardle, *Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies*. Boulder: UP Colorado. 2015. 15. Print.

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**New Writing Program Website: <http://www.unh.edu/writing/>**

Bidding a nostalgic farewell to our quirky old web presence, we rolled out our new website on February 16th. Drupal, we have arrived! Aside from bringing our web pages into compliance with the UNH standard, one of the major aims of the re-design was to streamline content and navigation with users in mind. In addition to handy menus under the tabs, there are now "Start Here" pages for faculty and students. The new Resources page, in particular, bears some mention. In addition to adding new material, we brought together all the resources that had previously been spread across multiple pages on the old website; the new page presents a "one-stop shopping" experience. In the future, we intend to expand this page with additional categories, to include teaching topics: for instance, over the summer we'll be adding a category for collaborative writing. We'll also be linking to more partners. Thoughts and suggestions are welcome.

We have had a strong response to the "Grammar for Grown-Ups" workshop (see "Future Tense"), with ten seats remaining as I write this (email if you'd like to attend). There is still time to apply for the 2017 WI Faculty Retreat as well: the deadline is at the end of this month. We'll see you again in the Fall with our next newsletter or at one of our events (or both!).

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